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Letter dated 23 October 2009 from the Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to the seventh summit meeting of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America-Peoples' Trade Treaty, held at Cochabamba, Bolivia on 17 October 2009.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reaffirms its commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations which, it believes, is the multilateral forum best suited to confront the challenges facing the international community.

In this regard, I have the honour to attach herewith a copy of the Special Declaration for a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would arrange for this letter and its annex to be circulated as a General Assembly document under agenda item 53.

(*Signed*) Jorge **Valero**
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 17 October 2009 from the Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Special Declaration for a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth

1. In the twenty-first century it is impossible to attain the full protection of human rights if, at the same time, we do not recognize and protect the rights of planet Earth and nature. It is only by guaranteeing the rights of Mother Earth that we will be able to guarantee the protection of human rights. Planet Earth can exist without human life, but we human beings cannot exist without planet Earth.

2. Just as the Second World War engendered a grave crisis for mankind which led to the adoption in 1948 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, today we are suffering from the grave consequences of the climate change crisis, which dictates the need for a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth.

3. The environmental crisis, of which global warming is one aspect, is demonstrating in a tangible way an essential principle which has been upheld for millenniums by the original and indigenous peoples throughout the world: that we human beings are part of an interdependent system of plants, animals, hills, forests, oceans and air which we must respect and safeguard. This system is what we call Mother Earth. "The Earth does not belong to man, but man belongs to the Earth." The Earth is not a collection of things which we can plunder, but a collection of natural entities with which we must learn to live in harmony and equilibrium, while respecting their rights.

4. The concept that only human beings have rights is giving rise to an increasing imbalance throughout the system by giving free rein to violation of the rights of other natural entities. There are differences between human beings and the other components of Mother Earth which must be taken into account in a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth.

5. It is inconceivable and unacceptable that even in the twenty-first century we do not recognize the rights of Mother Earth which gives us life.

6. The Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth must recognize, inter alia:

6.1. The right to life, which means the right to exist. Every ecosystem, animal or vegetable species, mountain, river or lake has the right to exist without being threatened by the activities of human beings, whose rights cease when they imperil the survival of Mother Earth, disrupting the balance of nature and coexistence with nature.

6.2. The right to regeneration of its biocapacity and its vital cycles. If we human beings consume and squander more than Mother Earth is able to restore or recreate, we are destroying the Planet, all living things and ourselves.

6.3. The right to a healthy environment, which means the right of Mother Earth, rivers, fish, animals and trees, just like human beings, to live free from pollution, poisoning and toxicity.

6.4. The right to harmony and equilibrium among each and all. This is the right to be recognized as part of a system on which we are all interdependent. It is the right to live in a state of equilibrium with all human beings. There are millions of living species on the planet, but only we human beings have the awareness and the ability to control our own actions in order to promote harmony with nature.

7. In order to ensure the full attainment of the rights of Mother Earth, States must apply precautionary and restrictive measures to activities which may lead to the extinction of species, the destruction of ecosystems or the permanent alteration of natural cycles.

8. The fact that natural entities cannot directly protect their rights cannot deprive them of that protection. Just as society and the State take over the protection of the rights of children and persons who are incapacitated, similarly they must ensure the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the rights of Mother Earth. The United Nations must promote and ensure respect for the rights of Mother Earth at the global level.

9. The Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth must be advanced within the framework of the United Nations as a common ideal towards which all people and nations must strive so that not only individuals but also institutions, drawing constant inspiration from the Declaration, may foster respect for those rights through teaching and education, and, through progressive measures at the national and international levels, ensure recognition of these rights and their universal and effective application.